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THE MARINE FISHERIES INFORMATION SERVICE: Technical and Extension Series envisages the rapid dissemination of information on marine and brackish water fishery resources and allied data available with the National Marine Living Resources Data Centre (NMLRDC) and the Research Divisions of the Institute, results of proven researches for transfer of technology to the fish farmers and industry and of other relevant information needed for Research and Development efforts in the marine fisheries sector.

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REGULATED MECHANISED AND TRADITIONAL FISHING IN TAMILNADU — AN APPROACH TO END CLASHES*

Introduction

Marine fishing in India is generally confined to narrow regions of nearshore areas. Till fifties marine fishing mostly by indigenous craft was in vogue throughout the Indian coast. In spite of successful experimental fishing of small mechanised boats introduced by Indo-Norwegian Project, mechanised fishing could not take strong roots till the end of sixties. Entering into prawn export trade was the turning point in the annals of fishing history of India and the enticing returns from exportable varieties encouraged introduction of mechanised boats on a large scale. This has brought in a new set of man power generally not drawn from traditional fishing communities. The presence of mechanised boats operated by those who were not involved in fishing earlier and the encroaching of the inshore fishing grounds by these boats created conflicts between the traditional and mechanised sectors, resulting in clashes between these two sectors leading to large scale damages to both

men and material. In order to save marine fishery from such a set back, different schemes are being introduced in different areas. One such novel scheme introduced in Tamil Nadu is described in the following.

The coast from Jagathapattinam (south) in Pudukkottai District to Mallipattinam (north) in Thanjavur District (Fig. 1) consists of 26 marine fish landing centres, 10 in the district of Pudukkottai and the rest in Thanjavur. Unlike the other regions in the east coast, the sea-front here is shallow and most of the time in the year this area is very calm and accessible for fishing by all types of gears. The operation of catamarans is significantly low in this stretch. This coastal region is a rich ground for important fisheries such as prawns, silverbellies otherwise locally called "KAARAL", sciaenids, pomfrets, seer fish and crabs. To exploit good grounds of prawns, mechanised fishing has been intensified in this area since past five years. The important mechanised fishing centres are Jagathapattinam, Kottapattinam, Sethubavachatram and Mallipattinam.

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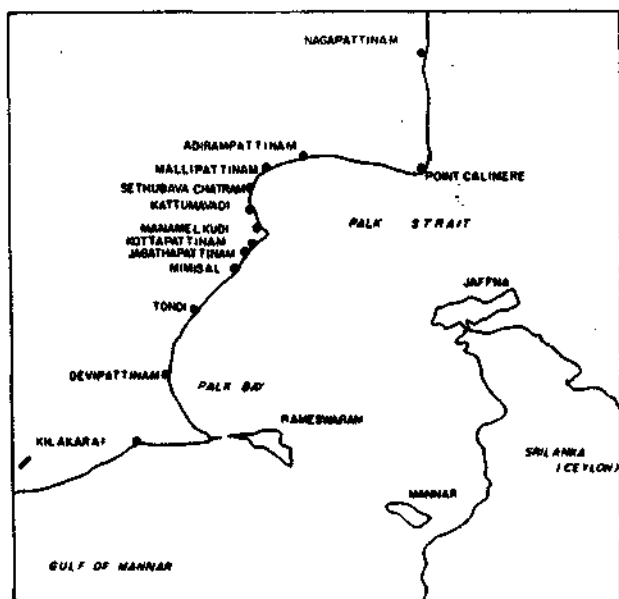


Fig. 1. Map showing the important fish landing centres in Palk Strait.

The mechanised boats in these areas are mainly owned by local fishermen only. In spite of the local ownership of the mechanised boats, clashes between local mechanised boat operators and indigenous boat operators from the neighbouring areas started in the year 1978 resulting in heavy losses.

Crafts and gears

Apart from mechanised trawlers numbering about 500, there are about 1000 plank built boats and dug out canoes, numbering about 10. As mentioned earlier, only a small number of catamarans, not more than 20, is available in this stretch. The major gears are 'Thallu Valai' (trawl net) 'Sippi Valai', 'Koi Valai', 'Nandu Valai' (all gill nets), 'Adi Valai' (drag net) and 'Thoondi' (hooks & lines).

Catch composition

The annual estimates of marine fish landings in this region from mechanised units were about 50,000 tonnes during 1981 and 1982 forming about 80% of total landings. Out of this, prawn catches accounted for about 3500 tonnes. Major contribution to the prawn came from *Penaeus semisulcatus*, *P. indicus* and *Metapenaeus affinis*. Among others, *Leiognathus*, sciaenids and other crustaceans including the crab *Portunus pelagicus* were the major components.

Reasons for the clashes

Due to the presence of good fishing grounds, particularly for prawns, combined with favourable fishing

conditions almost throughout the year in this region, the local fishermen have intensified mechanised fishing. The number of mechanised trawling boats owned by local fishermen at Jagathapattinam, Kottapattinam, Sethubavachatram and Mallipattinam are 120, 180, 80 and 100 respectively. In addition, mechanised trawling boats from other regions such as Colachel, Mandapam, Nagapattinam, Kaveripattinam, Cuddalore and Pondicherry also converge to this area for seasonal exploitation, the major fishing season for prawns being October to March. Increased tempo of mechanised fishing in these centres was not received well by indigenous craft owners of the fishing villages. This culminated in the major clashes between the two sectors in the year 1978, leading to heavy damages.

Regulated fishing

In order to avoid such clashes a Peace Council was formed with the local R.D.O. as Chairman and representatives from State Fisheries Department, mechanised boat owners and indigenous craft owners as members. The Peace Council has drawn up a programme to regulate fishing activities.

Since prawns are caught in good quantities during night time, intensity of fishing at night by both indigenous and mechanised crafts is high, resulting in clashes between these two sectors in the night. It is complained by indigenous craft owners that their gears are damaged by the mechanised crafts during night time and the culprits normally escape in dark. Hence the Peace Council suggested on a quota basis, 3 days night fishing to mechanised crafts in a week, fixing the days in advance and allotted the rest of the four days for non-mechanised crafts. However, during day time between 6.00 hrs and 18.00 hrs there is no such restriction and all crafts are allowed to fish, since during day time there is lesser chances of indigenous gears getting damaged by mechanised crafts. In case indigenous gears get damaged during night by mechanised boats on these four days allotted for indigenous crafts, then due compensation should be given by the mechanised crafts to the affected indigenous craft owners. On the other days since mechanised boats have the right to fish, if the indigenous boats also operate and their gears get damaged, then no compensation would be paid.

Mechanised boat owners associations and their function

In order to safeguard their interests, mechanised boat owners have formed Associations in each centre and it appears that they strictly adhere to the 3 day



Fig. 2. Boat owners queueing up for receiving tokens at Jagathapattinam.

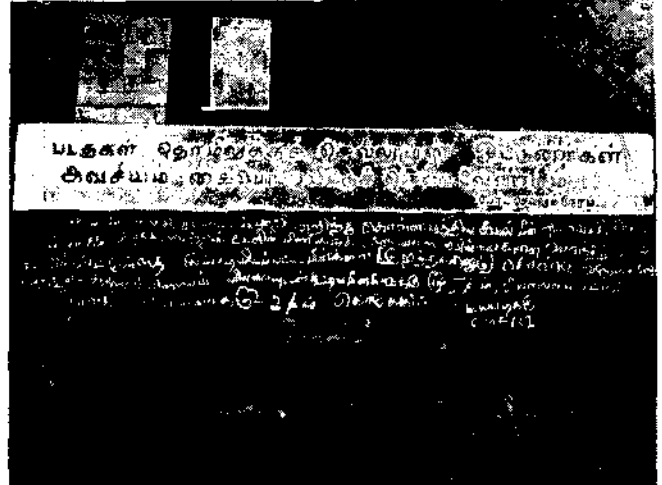


Fig. 3. Display of information to fishermen in front of the Mechanised Boat Owners Association office at Kottapattinam.



Fig. 4. Crabs from the catch for disposal at Kottapattinam.



Fig. 5. Resting mechanised boats and crowd awaiting the catches landed by carrier boats at Kottapattinam.



Fig. 6. Sun drying Silver bellies 'kaaral', part of the catches.



Fig. 7. Calm and quiet.

night fishing in a week. For this purpose they issue tokens on the allotted days of fishing for those mechanised boats after collecting a nominal fee of Rs. 3/- to Rs. 5/- depending on the centre. Apart from this token money, each mechanised boat operator deposits one good sized prawn from the catch to the Association. The sale proceeds adds up to the Association's general fund. The amount thus collected is used for the payment of compensation towards the damages caused to the gears of the indigenous craft owners. This is also utilised for social purposes such as health, education and religious festivals. The unity among mechanised boat owners belonging to different regions, communities and centres, works so nicely that the interest of this sector is well protected.

The orderliness in which the mechanised boat owners come and stand in queue to receive the tokens from 3.00 P.M. onwards on the allotted day for the ensuing night fishing is commendable. The systematic way of collection of token money and prawns and utilisation

of the proceeds to various needs of the association members indicates that the programme drawn up by the Peace Council is working satisfactorily.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that the schedule of restricted night fishing for mechanised boats for 3 days in a week and traditional boats for 4 days is strictly kept up by the respective boat owners without any violation, while all the types of boats operate during day time. It is equally interesting to see that the mechanised boat owners are eager to operate their boats on these three days, strictly adhering to the schedule as evidenced by the way in which they wait for getting the token for night fishing. This implies the economic viability of their operations under these constraints. Therefore, it is suggested that this system of regulated fishing may be extended to other regions where the clashes between these two sectors exist, especially concerning night fishing.

